

THE AHU A RONGO PROJECT: ARCHAEOLOGICAL
RESEARCH ON EASTER ISLAND, CHILE
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Abstract: Since 1935 the Royal Museums for Art and History in Brussels are in the possession of an archaic-looking colossal sculpture from Rapa Nui (Easter Island). This basalt statue, almost three meters high and weighing six tons, is one of the very few *moai* that have ever been taken from the island. It represents the deity of tuna fish "Pou Hakanononga" and is particularly interesting because it is believed to be one of the most ancient examples of its kind (the statue is tentatively dated about AD 1000-1200). The location where it was found, Ahu a Rongo, is a ceremonial complex on the west coast of Easter Island, immediately north of the town of Hanga Roa. This *ahu* (stone cult platform) has never been properly investigated. It is currently endangered by urban expansion and several other threatening factors resulting from its proximity to human settlement. A single 2 m by 1 m test unit executed in 1995 and subsequent dating of obsidian artifacts has indicated that the initial platform at Ahu a Rongo was probably constructed sometime during the 1100s. This is one of the earliest dates obtained thus far for *ahu* architecture. A preliminary survey in 1997 by Dr. Francina Forment, curator of Polynesian and Micronesian art at the Royal Museums for Art and History, has confirmed our presumption that the archaeological potentialities of the Ahu a Rongo site are considerable. For the year 2001, the funding of this new exploration at Rapa Nui is granted by the National Geographic Society (Washington, USA).

Moai Sightings

"MUSIC IN HIGH PLACES", a DirectTV series, has one episode filmed on Easter Island. These series, pairing musicians with sacred sites in the world including Machu Picchu, Delphi, and Rapa Nui, is to "capture each musician's own personal journey". The blurb, appearing in *New Age* magazine, fails to mention who is associated with our favorite island. Music in High Places is also shown at www.musicinhighplaces.msn.com

TAHAI'S FAMOUS *MOAI*, WITH EYES AND TOPKNOT, is featured on a full page (11x16") layout of *Il Giornale dell'Arte* for June 2000, sent in by our sharp-eyed Italian correspondent, Andrea Pasquelin. The photographed statue is advertising an Italian firm named Gondrand that ships works of art. The caption says "Some people think they'll never leave here" referring to the fact that Gondrand was responsible for shipping the *moai* that was exhibited in Milano a few years back. A small inset photograph shows that statue, draped in a rope netting, and in the process of being moved to the museum.

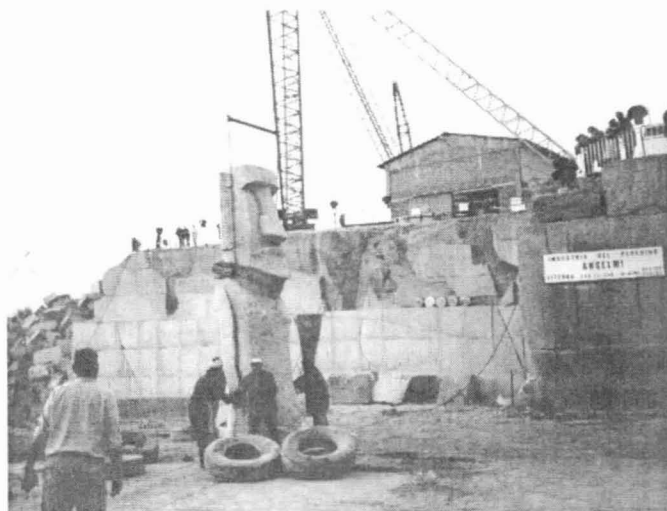
I DON'T THINK WE'RE IN KANSAS ANYMORE, TOTO. The December 26, 2000 issue of the *Topeka Capitol-Journal* has an

article describing seven Easter Island statue replicas that are standing on a hillside, overlooking US Highway 56, outside of Burlingame, Kansas. They were made by an auto mechanic named Butch Mauer who originally created one for his shop in Lyndon, Kansas. A fellow resident of Osage County, Bill Sherry, inquired about the statue and when told of Butch's longing to put up a bunch of them, he stated that he had the highest hill in Osage County, in full view of the highway. The two men erected the seven statues in October 2000. The statues are of fiberglass with wood backing and were made in a mold.

IT HAD TO HAPPEN. Now there is a *moai* lamp! As advertised in a catalog (The Pyramid Collection), the blurb states, "Inspired by the mysterious *moai* megaliths.... it casts an amber light, creating unforgettable mood and atmosphere..." Oh yessss. The resin *moai* are one foot high and cost fifty bucks.

FOR ANYONE INTO *MOAI* SIGHTINGS, check out The Book of TIKI by Sven A. Kirsten (ISBN 3-8228-6417-X) from Amazon (\$23.99). There are 287 full color pages printed on high quality paper; published by Taschen. This book explores all aspects of the Tiki Bar craze in the 50's and 60's—one more thing for which we can thank Thor Heyerdahl.

SANDY NIELSEN, A LONG-TIME Rapanuiphile, sent us an advertisement for a cruise company that has it all, in one frightening picture: pyramids, Buddha, a moose (under palm trees), the leaning tower, and our beloved *moai*, with a multicolor parrot on its head. Not bloody likely....



The village square at Vitorchiano, near Viterbo, Italy, boasts a scowling *moai* that was made in 1990 by fifteen Rapanui islanders. The photograph shows the statue in the process of being moved from the quarry with the help of a huge crane and some old rubber tires. A *pukao* was added once it was placed in the village square. Our thanks to Andrea Pasquelin of Turin for this photo.

THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE HAS a cartoon strip called "Sherman's Lagoon" that often features a *moai*, located at the bottom of a lagoon. Called the Kahuna, it dispenses wisdom and witty sayings to assorted sea creatures. This aberration was brought to our attention by Calvin Malone.



Hoa Hakananaia in its new location in the court of the British Museum in London (photograph by Elena Miklashevich)



Patrick Corbett (shown here with his daughter) did a double take when he drove past this wine cooperative in Bonnieux, France. It was closed that day so they could not inquire as to why a winery had *moai* displayed out front. A bold vintage, with an excellent nose?

What's New in the Pacific

THE CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE at the Hague in November 2000 failed to agree on steps to combat the threat of climatic changes. For the Pacific, it is clear that the lifestyle of the rich world was not negotiable, even at the cost of rising sea levels. As was noted in the *Pacific News Bulletin*: "Rich countries don't really care whether our islands sink, float or fly." A 5% reduction in carbon emissions is not enough to curb the threats of climate change for the Pacific Islands. "Still recovering from the aftermath of the nuclear bomb, Pacific islanders now need to prepare for the climatic bomb."

Pacific News Bulletin, 16(1):6-7, January 2001.

Niue

ON JAN 30TH, TWO US BANKS IMPOSED an embargo on transfers of money to the island of Niue, the world's smallest autonomous state (population 2,103). Niue is accused of being a tax haven, having an indulgent attitude toward the proceeds of crime, and is suspected of money laundering. A Panama City law firm specializes in registering offshore firms through "international commercial companies." This tiny island has more than 6,000 such firms registered in Niue. These are said to be "empty shells" such as can be found in the British Virgin Islands, the Bahamas and Panama. According to the US state Department, some companies are fronts for East Asian or Russian mafia and Latin American drug cartels. Commenting on the embargo, Niue's prime minister said, "It's a brutal blow to us. The money enabled us to survive." The registration fees that are paid annually account for 80% of the country's budget; the rest comes from exporting sweet potatoes, the rental of telephone lines and internet addresses. Members of the Niue government are keen to keep the money of dubious origin flowing in. Geographical remoteness of some other islands in the region has attracted those interested in financial crime. The report mentions also Nauru, Vanuatu, Samoa, the Cook and Marshall Islands.

Guardian Weekly, February 15-21, 2001: 30.



ANOTHER SIGHTING for the Chilean wine palm comes from Italy, with thanks to Kees de Boer. The Botanical Institute at Pisa, Italy, has two fine specimens of *Jubaea* standing in front of the Institute, which was constructed in 1890.

FIJI

IN ORDER TO PRESERVE ITS NATURAL ENVIRONMENT and continue to attract the tourist dollar, Fiji's tourism industry must develop an ecotourism strategy, according to the president of the Fiji Ecotourism Association (FETA). Fiji hosted their first annual conference on ecotourism on December 11-12, at Nadi. Titled, "Shaping the Future of Ecotourism" the conference involved delegates from Fiji, the Pacific region, New Zealand, Australia and the United States.

The University of the South Pacific Bulletin, 33(40), December 2000.

ETHNIC DIVISIONS IN FIJI ARE CITED AT the country's only university, and these mirror the political tensions that have divided its 850,000 inhabitants. Although the University of the South Pacific escaped damage in last May's riots, the coup has left its mark. The university closed for two months, over 50 staff members resigned, some robberies have occurred and anything politically sensitive is avoided. The university also faces the divisive issue of the vice-chancellor who was appointed based on ethnic issues. One academic was quoted as saying "This is another nail in the coffin of what until recently was one of the region's premier centres of excellence."

The Guardian Weekly, February 15-21: 2001 :25.

HAWAII

THE EAST-WEST CENTER IN HONOLULU HOSTED the 6th Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders (30 January-4 February). Prime Ministers, Presidents, and Ministers from Pacific nations and territories heard pessimistic views of globalization. The strongest critics were from Niue and the Cook Islands, who claimed that globalization was preventing the improvement of the quality of life, and represented a new order of colonialism. This view was challenged by the former Fijian President Mara who said "colonization was usage of power by strong nations over weaker ones, while globalization is the use of power by multinationals against the weaker." American Samoa Governor Sunia was more optimistic, as was President Kessai Note of the Marshall Islands, who stated: "...we cannot stand in its way, for to do so is to invite disaster upon us."

Pacific News Bulletin, No. 16(2) February 2001

COOK ISLANDS

THE COOK ISLANDS BECAME THE SIXTH PACIFIC ISLANDS country to ratify the 1995 Waigani Convention. This convention bans the importation of hazardous and radioactive wastes and controls the transboundary movement and management of hazardous wastes within the South Pacific region. The Waigani Convention will come into force when ten countries have ratified it. So far, only six countries have done so.

Pacific News Bulletin, Vol. 15(11), November 2000

SOLOMON ISLANDS

THE TRIBAL WAR IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS last year resulted in the destruction of the University of the South Pacific's Institute of Marine Resources (IMR) at Aruligo, Solomon Islands. The Institute was expected to receive a major grant from the European Union but that has now been cancelled. Although the gov-

ernment of the Solomon Islands was determined to retain the Institute, they have not identified an alternate and safe place to relocate the site and the facilities. Most of the assets of the IMR are lost, along with the staff who longer will work in an unsafe environment.

The University of the South Pacific Bulletin, 33(40), December 2000.

AOTEAROA (NEW ZEALAND)

THE WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL, NEW ZEALAND, planned a large welcome ceremony for two French warships, but had to cancel it due to protesters from several organizations who displayed banners saying "Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific", and "French Military out of the Pacific Now". The ceremony was moved inside the old Town Hall instead.

Pacific News Bulletin, No. 16(2) for February 2001

PITCAIRN ISLAND

A COLD SPELL IN JULY dropped hail on Pitcairn Island, only the 3rd time on record. But then not a drop of rain fell for some 7 weeks in September and October, drying up crops. But the sea life is alive and well: the island was visited by a pod of whales that makes an annual stop at the island. Apparently the big rat eradication program failed as once again rats are making life miserable for all.


GALAPAGOS ISLANDS



THESE ISLANDS ARE NOT part of Polynesia, but the recent oil spill there has brought up some important, but not usually publicized, considerations. While there is little doubt that the oil spill was a serious threat to one of the wonders of the world, a perceptive article in *The Guardian Weekly* (Vol.164(6):21) applies equally well to Easter Island and other popular tourist destinations. The Galapagos Islands are becoming a laboratory to see how man affects an entire ecology. The following are some highlights from "Comment" by Jon Vidal, who points out that tourism and fishing have wreaked havoc with the marine environment; sea turtles die from swallowing plastic thrown overboard from cruise ships; sea lions cut their muzzles playing with tin cans that are on the ocean floor.

In the 60s and 70s, tourism here took off, encouraged by the Ecuadorian government's need for foreign currency. Growth led to an increase in immigration from the mainland and most of those have turned to the sea for work. The resident population has increased from 6000 to 16,000 in ten years.

Both tourists and residents add pressure to the scarce resources on the Galapagos, from seafood to fresh water. Remote fishing villages have discos and hotels. Divers devastate black coral formations to make jewelry for tourists. Ecuadorian fishermen demand larger quotas of lobster and shark, and vandalize the property of those who want conservation practices to prevail. Rare tortoises have been taken 'captive'.

Vidal points out that while oil spills are visible symbols of mankind's assault on nature, in five years there likely will be no evidence of the oil spill. But the impact of humans continues: "If Darwin were alive today, he would surely place mankind as the prime mover in global evolution." 

What's New in Hangaroa

A CELEBRATION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY of the first flight to Rapa Nui took place on January 20th. Two of the plane's original crew were on the island: the navigator and the radio man. The Chilean Air Force flew them and 127 others over on a 707, and they brought with them a glider that circled and landed at the airport at the precise time that *Manutara* first landed 50 years ago. An Air Force band, flown over for the event, played on. There were also celebrations held in La Serena, Chile, the place from whence the plane took off.

TOURISM IN CHILE has been the focus of a number of newspaper articles in the Chilean press. Although a record forty-one cruise ships are expected to dock at Valparaíso this year, critics complain that when tourists arrive, those who wish to get off are just dumped in the scruffy dock area where all the trinkets are sold. In order to see anything of the city, or nearby Viña del Mar, they must do it on their own—and at their own risk, of course. There is a demand for tours and buses to be available. As for tourism on Rapa Nui, it was noted that the number of visitors has grown from 5000 in 1995 to 21,500 this last year. The average stay on the island is only 4 days. However, those numbers are still less than Torres de Paine received, namely 60,000. (Torres de Paine is located at the southern end of the Andes, near Punta Arenas). It is projected that, in the year 2008, Easter Island's population will be close to 5000, and by 2005, there will be around 50,000 visitors. Tourism now generates 7.5 million dollars; this works out to US\$2,500 per capita. In 1998 a Cámara de Turismo—Chamber of Tourism—was created on the island and the government provided around US \$80,000 to get it started. Their motto: "Tarai Piri: Working together." One of their concerns is the preservation of the island's cultural patrimony.

SPRAYING EFFORTS ON THE ISLAND are on-going in order to get rid of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes that can carry yellow fever and dengue fever. A PR campaign is in process, called "You or the Mosquito". No cases have yet been detected.

THE CATCHMENT BASINS that we mentioned in Rapa Nui Journal 14 (4) :124 were constructed by a company that is associated with Chile's ex-president Elwing. They were built by Jaime Riroroko, who was paid a total of 1.5 million pesos. The bulldozing of the soil was free, done by the public works on the island. The recipients of the catchment basins were fifteen people who presented the project to CONADI. The firm charged CONADI 180 million pesos for the basins, and then got another subsidy from the government. They made a good profit as the plastic that lines the basins is inexpensive.

CURRENT EXCAVATIONS AT AHU O RONGO, on the west coast near the island cemetery, are under the direction of Nicolas Cauwe and Dirk Huyge of the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels. Ahu O Rongo is the site from which the basalt statue known as Pou Hakanononga was collected by the Franco-Belgium Expedition to Easter Island (1934-35); it is now on display in Brussels.

Under the south wing of the *ahu* an older phase was found, consisting of a *poro* pavement; this likely correlates with the statue. Carbon has been recovered, so dates are to be expected. One of the large border stones of the *ahu* wing, which seems to form part of the older phase, has petroglyph designs, among them a whale (a rare design in Easter Island rock art).

The fact that this structure is superimposed by the south wing of Ahu O Rongo seems to verify the suggestion that Pou Hakanononga and similar odd statues (red scoria Moai a Umu, *moai* at Ahu Otoki and possibly also Tukuturi) are indeed archaic statues. Whether or not the petroglyphs are to be correlated with the earlier phase of the *ahu* is of course difficult to know. It appears that the *ahu* below the south wing of Ahu O Rongo must be a very old megalithic structure. We hope to have a full report on this project in our next issue. '



The Tahatai hotel, under construction last October is now open for business. This view is from the road that runs along the coast near the caleta.

A NEW HOTEL CALLED TAHATAI is finished, and now in use. Although not a 5 star hotel, it is centrally located and close to the ocean. It features cottages as well as hotel rooms and has a pool in the patio area of the hotel grounds.

A LARGE SOUVENIR/HANDICRAFT roofed market has been constructed at the airport where the parking spaces used to be opposite the LanChile counter. It was designed to give a better place for local artisans to sell their souvenirs. Formerly, those selling handicrafts were on the walkway outside the terminal entries.

A RARE CASE OF MENINGITIS caused the death of a young Rapanui man from the island. All persons who had possible contact with him were examined but no one else was found with the disease. Many parents kept their children home from school so classes were empty of students in the last week before vacation.

THE TAPATI FESTIVAL in February garnered some negative comments. These involved the organizational parts of the festival, such as where did all the money go, and why it was so poorly organized (wrong people at the wrong places, etc.). Some events were hours late getting started (nothing new there). And there was grumbling over favoritism with regard to seating for the performances. ENTEL was a sponsor of the event, so a large group of "important" persons got up-front seating. Others who also donated, did not.

THE PAVING OF THE ROAD that runs past the Hotel Iorana at the foot of the runway is nearly finished. A relief to all who have to drive it. This road is now called Policarpo Toro after the naval man who first suggested the annexation by Chile. It formerly was Atamu Tekena. A short while ago, these two street names were switched. So while the hotels and other establishments have not changed locations, they are now on different streets. This may sound a bit confusing to outsiders, but it is very Rapa Nui.

A GRASS FIRE AT THE QUARRY, Rano Raraku, effected the kneeling statue, called Tukururi, as well as many other statues. Damage was caused to the statues by the fire and heat. Fires are set by islanders who run horses and cattle; they burn off the dead grass to encourage new growth. But the fires often burn out of control. Sadly, those who set the fires seem not to realize that tourists come to see the statues, not horses and cows.

THE MIR SPLASHDOWN. A flurry of activity on Rapa Nui preceded the reentry of the Mir space station. Hedging their bets, news agencies lined up various individuals on Easter Island for eye-witness accounts of the expected fall-out of space debris. Rapanui resident, Conny Martin, who was interviewed by Reuters, noted that Rapanui islanders had little information about all this, and she added, "It's business as usual here and we're just hoping that nothing will land on us. What can we do? We can't move out of the way." News agencies in Australia also contacted some English-speaking islanders as they wanted to do a piece on the precautions being taken by the Chilean government in case of any debris fallout near the island. However, no one mentioned the possibility of danger on Chilean TV so the Rapanui were unaware of the situation. But LANChile cancelled some scheduled flights to Tahiti to avoid any possible collision with falling debris. Other Pacific islands, closer to the action, reacted more nervously. In Fiji, ships were kept in port and residents warned to stay in their homes. Things were different in Tahiti as they were involved in local elections that seemed more explosive than debris falling from the sky.

One Rapanui islander said that he hoped a piece of Mir would land in his yard so tourists would come, not just to see the *moai*, but also would pay to see pieces of Mir.

CONSTRUCTION ON THE NEW AIRPORT control tower has been postponed due to a conflict over the land belonging to the city and the shape of the tower, originally planned in the shape of a *moai*.

THE GOVERNOR announced that the island's population is now 4500 although a census has not been done since 1992.

THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII'i Archaeological Field School will have a project this summer, 2001, in Rapa Nui. Field work will be conducted on prehistoric habitations and other sites in a northwestern coastal sector of the island. For further information: Contact Dr. Terry L. Hunt, Department of Anthropology, University of Hawai'i; 2424 Maile Way, Honolulu, HI 96822. Email: thunt@hawaii.edu

BOOK REVIEWS

Easter Island Archaeology. Research on Early Rapanui Culture

Christopher M. Stevenson and William S. Ayres, eds.
Easter Island Foundation, 2000 \$25

Review by Paul G. Bahn

One of the millstones that has always hung around the neck of archaeology is the problem of the unpublished or long-delayed excavation report. A totally unpublished excavation is useless and injurious to knowledge, on a par with looting. Indeed it is a form of theft, since information is permanently withheld from the world (the excavation cannot be repeated) and thus destroyed. In fact one could argue that it is worse than theft, since many looters of sites are too ignorant to realize the damage they are doing; the same cannot usually be said of unethical excavators, and there is simply no excuse for them, especially where public funds have been wasted on their projects.

Scandalous examples of archaeological non-publication could be cited from every part of the world, but Easter Island has certainly suffered more than most from this scourge. If memory serves me correctly, Carlyle Smith mentioned at the Laramie meeting in 1993 that not even all of the data from the excavations carried out by members of the Norwegian Expedition in the 1950s had yet been analyzed or published. But at least those pioneers did publish extensive reports on their activities quite rapidly, in volumes which have become indispensable to Easter Island studies.

On the other hand, many excavations carried out on the island in more recent decades have yet to be published. We can all think of examples, and it has to be said that some Chilean specialists are among the worst culprits here. The present volume, however, goes a long way towards solving the problem of unpublished work by foreign (primarily American) excavators, and we should be grateful to the indefatigable Chris Stevenson—always exemplary in the rapidity and thoroughness of his own excavation reports—for rounding up this collection of material, some of which has been awaiting publication since 1981 and even, in some cases, since the early 1970s. And the Easter Island Foundation is to be thanked and congratulated for taking on the task of publication.

Having said that, one must admit that few of the articles here set the pulses racing, and indeed some are of the kind where one immediately turns to the concluding summary. But nevertheless, basic data of the kind presented here are the essential building blocks of future archaeological synthesis and interpretation, and it is therefore crucial that they should be available in printed form. The volume contains a tremendous variety of material—excavations of different kinds of platforms, of caves, of beach deposits; various studies of skeletal remains and cremations; rock art, and color symbolism; artifact use-wear and obsidian hydration rates; subsistence patterns and original vegetation. It's a potpourri, a curate's egg; but nevertheless it is a valuable addition to the literature. And above all one hopes that it creates a precedent and acts as a spur to other guilty parties in